

## Standards for School Leadership Practice: What a Leader Needs to Know and Be Able to Do

Districts do not have to go it alone in the development of state-of-the-art leadership development plans and programs. Ample help is available-some of it on the e-Lead website. The core of any program should be its standards for what the leader should know and be able to do, and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's (ISLLC) "**Standards for School Leaders**" provides the basis for the information contained on e-Lead. Other useful, if slightly less authoritative, sets of standards or guiding principles are also available. Selected sets of standards are outlined below. Though they vary in substance, they all tend to place a deliberate emphasis on the centrality of student learning.

The field of school leadership in the United States is coalescing around the ISLLC Standards. For example, 35 states have adopted them; the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) used them to develop their standards; tens of thousands of candidates for principal licensure have taken the ISLLC licensing exam; hundreds of preparation programs are revising their curricula aligned with the ISLLC Standards; and other organizations such as the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) have openly, and in writing, recommended the use of the ISLLC Standards by their membership.

This does not mean other Standards are not worthwhile. They definitely are. However, the ISLLC Standards are the only common set of standards developed by a national body of state departments of education (originally 23 states) and national leadership organizations-originally 12, including all of the members of National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA)-that were designed for all school leaders pre-K through 12, and, as mentioned, are being universally accepted and recognized. National membership organizations, such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), all use the ISLLC Standards in a variety of ways, even though each of those organizations have their own set of standards for their own memberships.

Standards for school leaders take their place amidst a longer, broader history of education standards in the United States. The 1983 watershed A Nation at Risk report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education which portrayed a dismal state of affairs for education in this country, served as a call to reform schools, which in turn has lead to standards based approaches to reform. A Nation at Risk findings continue to be a touchstone for those wishing to assess the well-being of our educational system and outcomes for students.

Other landmarks in the standards movement include the Goals 2000 initiative launched in 1994 by Congress and the Clinton administration which

established, among other things, a National Education Standards and Improvement Council with the purpose of reviewing and certifying a host of national and state standards and assessments, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which requires standards and assessment for reading, math, and science to be set by each state and is aimed at holding schools accountable for meeting these standards. Each of these efforts was designed to hold all students, including disadvantaged children, to high academic standards.

## STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

The Institute for Educational Leadership's (IEL) Task Force on the Principalship declares, "**the top priority of the principalship must be leadership for learning.**" The Task Force's report, "Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship," specifies three key roles that the principals of the 21st century should fulfill:

- **Instructional leadership** that focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decisionmaking and accountability;
- **Community leadership** manifested in a big-picture awareness of the school's role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners and residents; close relations with parents and others; and advocacy for school capacity building and resources; and
- **Visionary leadership** that demonstrates energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building.

The following sets of standards incorporate, in one form or another, the proposition that all "principals do-establishing a vision, setting goals, managing staff, rallying the community, creating effective learning environments, building support systems for students, guiding instruction and so on-must be in service of student learning." (IEL 2000)

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium adopted its "Standards for School Leaders" in 1996. ISSLC "decided at the outset...to focus on standards" because they "were convinced that standards provided an especially appropriate and particularly powerful leverage point for reform," because they "found a major void in this area of educational administration-a set of common standards remains conspicuous by its absence," and they "believed that the standards approach provided the best avenue to allow diverse stakeholders to drive improvement efforts along a variety of fronts." (ISLLC 1996)

ISLLC's standards "differ from similar previous efforts because of their specific focus on high expectations of success anticipated for 'all' students, their emphasis on teaching and learning as the primary grounding for school

leadership, and because of the importance the standards place on beliefs and values in providing direction for school leaders." (Van Meter & McMinn)

***ISLLC's Standards for School Leaders:***

**Standard 1:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

**Standard 2:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth.

**Standard 3:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

**Standard 4:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, and mobilizing community resources.

**Standard 5:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

**Standard 6:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

ISLLC accompanies each of its standards with indicators of the relevant knowledge, dispositions, and performances required of school leaders aspiring to meet the standards -- a "framework" that is "borrowed" from The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium. ISLLC standards for school leaders have been used to "prepare school leaders, to assess existing school leaders, and to guide school leaders' professional development." (Van Meter & McMinn)

In 2001, The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) merged its "periodically updated" documents, Standards for Quality Elementary & Middle Schools and Proficiencies for Principals, into a new guide, **Leading Learning Communities: NAESP Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do**. The impetus for this change was their belief that one "cannot have a first-rate school without first-rate school leadership" and that school leaders need to exhibit more than charisma and good management skills. As such, NAESP has tied these standards to its "Indicators of Quality

Schools": Leadership that places student and adult learning at the center of schools; Expectations for and commitment to high standards of academic performance; Safe and secure learning environments for students; Curriculum and instruction tied to school and student learning goals; Collaborative learning community for adults; and An engaged community. NAESP has derived its standards from what principals themselves see as their proper role and focus.

***NAESP's Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do:***

**Standard 1:** Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.

**Standard 2:** Set high expectations for the performance of all students and adults.

**Standard 3:** Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed upon academic standards.

**Standard 4:** Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.

**Standard 5:** Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement.

**Standard 6:** Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.

"Leading Learning Communities" provides a set of "strategies for achieving" each standard. For example, the strategies for achieving standard one are: Create and foster a community of learners; Embody learner-centered leadership; Seek leadership contributions from multiple sources; Tie the daily operations of the schoolhouse to school and student learning goals.

**The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)** asserts that professional development for principals "should be incorporated into a principal's regular schedule - through learning and practice that takes place on the job with support and assistance of colleagues, mentors, and supervisors." NASSP finds that professional development should help principals to:

- Validate teaching and learning as the central activities of the school;
- Engage with peers and teachers in career-long learning to improve student achievement;
- Collaborate with colleagues to achieve organizational goals while still meeting the needs of individuals;
- Use data in planning and decision making for continuous development;
- Model effective teaching and learning processes;

- Incorporate measures of accountability that direct attention to valued learning outcomes; and
- Find opportunities to work, discuss and solve problems with peers.

**The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) School Leadership Initiative** "connects SREB, leadership academies and universities across the region in collaborative work focused on significantly improving leadership preparation and development." As part of the leadership initiative, the State Leadership Academy Network pulls together the work of school districts and six leadership academies to address how school leaders "are tapped, trained, certified and supported as school teams work to improve learning and student achievement." The State Leadership Academy Network Framework includes these "[Critical Success Factors for School Leaders](#)":

### **Owning the Vision**

- High Expectations for All
- A Shared Vision and Purpose
- Strategic and Systems Thinking

### **Using Data to Drive Change**

- Data to Determine Needs
- Data to Monitor and Improve

### **Organizing to Improve Student Learning**

- Knowledge of and Focus on Teaching & Learning
- Increasing Learning Time
- Providing and Participating in Focused and Sustained Professional Development
- Building and Leading Teams
- Using Technology for Learning
- Communicating with Educational Community

### **Maximizing Leadership and Effectiveness**

- Personal Values
- Understanding Self and Others
- Leading Problem Solving
- Modeling and Encouraging Creativity
- Communicating Effectively

### **Demonstrating a Passion for Student Learning**

## Building a Personalized Learning Environment

Also, the Collaborative for Technology Standards for School Administrators has adopted standards for 1. Leadership and Vision; 2. Learning and Teaching; 3. Productivity and Professional Practice; 4. Support, Management, and Operations; 5. Assessment and Evaluation and; 6. Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues.

### DEFINING PERFORMANCE

If having agreed upon standards is the first step, then putting them to use in schools is the next. While ISLLC itself has delineated "performances" for school administrators (along with "knowledge" and "dispositions"), and other standards makers do much the same, other sources go into deeper depth in describing how to put standards into action. Such resources can be valuable in determining the content of professional development for school leaders.

One tool for taking that next step is [WestEd's "Moving Leadership Standards into Everyday Work: Descriptions of Practice."](#) The guide lists ISLLC standards, defines them further, breaks them into component parts and describes practices that are directed toward, approach, meet, or exemplify each standard-"four levels of leadership development."

For example, ISLLC Standard 2 (see above) is summarized and sectioned into four parts: 2.1 Develop School Culture and Ensure Equity; 2.2 Guide the Instruction Program; 2.3 Guide Professional Growth of Staff; and Create and 2.4 Utilize Accountability Systems. Peeling the onion further, part 2.2 (as with the other three parts) is given a full-page description and practices at each "level" of mastery are describes. For instance, practice that "approaches the standard" includes an administrator who "engages faculty in dialogue around the instructional program, with a focus on standards and on site data" and more, while practice that "exemplifies the standard" is characterized by a school leader who "uses her or his deep understanding of standards-based teaching and learning to provide ongoing, coherent guidance for implementation and continuous improvement of the school's instructional system" and so on.

[The Educational Testing Services "A Framework for School Leaders: Linking the ISLLC Standards to Practice" \(Hessel & Holloway\)](#) is designed:

- To serve as a foundation and to provide a common language for redefining and refocusing the role of the school leader as defined by the ISLLC Standards
- To articulate the role of the school leader as defined by the ISLLC Standards
- To serve as a standards-based approach to describe various school leaders' levels of performance.

Much like the WestEd guide, this framework goes about "distilling the essential features of each Standard into four concise phrases" or "components" and then describes four levels of performance-Rudimentary, Developing, Proficient, and Accomplished" for each component.

## **References**

Hessel, Karen; Holloway, John. "A Framework for School Leaders: Linking the ISLLC Standards to Practice" Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey, 2002.

"Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium: Standards for School Leaders." Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC, 1996.

"Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship." Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, DC, October 2000.

"Leading Learning Communities: NAESP Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do." National Association of Elementary School Principals, Alexandria, Virginia, 2001.

"Moving Leadership Standards into Everyday Work: Descriptions of Practice." WestEd, San Francisco, California, 2003.

"Principal Professional Development." National Association of Secondary School Principals, website, April 2001.

"Standards for Staff Development (Revised)." National Staff Development Council, Oxford, Ohio, 2001.

"Technology Standards for School Administrators." Collaborative for Technology Standards for School Administrators, 2001.

Van Meter, Eddy J.; McMinn, Cynthia A. "Measuring a Leader." Journal of Staff Development v. 22 no1 (Winter 2001) p. 32-5.

## **Related Links**

- Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium  
[www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate\\_School\\_Leaders\\_Licensure\\_Consortium/](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_School_Leaders_Licensure_Consortium/)
- NAESP on the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders  
[www.naesp.org/comm/p0902c.htm](http://www.naesp.org/comm/p0902c.htm)
- NAESP Principal Online "Hot Topics" section of writings on professional development  
[www.naesp.org/hot\\_pdev.htm](http://www.naesp.org/hot_pdev.htm)

- SREB's Framework for Redesigned Leadership Preparation  
[http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/UnivLead/SREB\\_UniversityLeadershipFrame work.pdf](http://www.sreb.org/main/Leadership/UnivLead/SREB_UniversityLeadershipFrame%20work.pdf)
- PBS on "Leading Together" Using ISLLC standards:  
[www.pbs.org/unctv/nogreatercalling/educators/leadtoget.html](http://www.pbs.org/unctv/nogreatercalling/educators/leadtoget.html)
- "School Leaders and Standards: A Vision for Leadership." International Confederation of Principals [www.icponline.org/feature\\_articles/f14\\_01.htm](http://www.icponline.org/feature_articles/f14_01.htm)
- ERIC on the "Role of the School Leader"  
[eric.uoregon.edu/trends\\_issues/rolelead/index.html](http://eric.uoregon.edu/trends_issues/rolelead/index.html)
- Technology Standards for School Administrators [cnets.iste.org/tssa/](http://cnets.iste.org/tssa/)
- WestEd's Professional and Organizational Learning (POL) program  
[www.wested.org/cs/wew/view/pg/7](http://www.wested.org/cs/wew/view/pg/7)
- IEL's Principal Task Force Report  
<http://www.iel.org/programs/21st/reports/principal.pdf>